CITY OF KENT
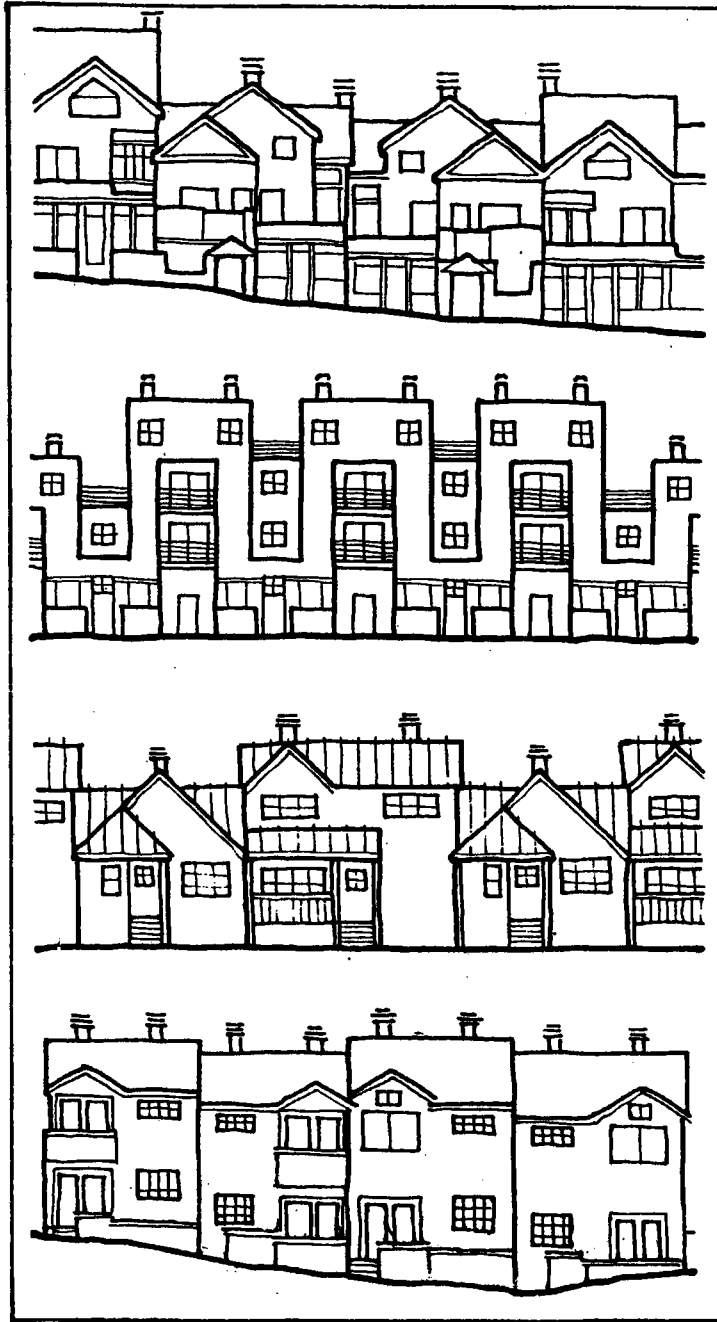

MULTIFAMILY DESIGN
REVIEW HANDBOOK

Kent Planning Department
April, 1994

Multifamily Design Review Handbook

INTRODUCTION

Kent's livability and image as a residential community are significantly impacted by multifamily development. There are nearly twice as many multifamily units as single-family.

Growth is a fact for all communities in the Seattle-Tacoma area. In addition, growth management policies are being adopted in Kent to reduce urban sprawl and concentrate new growth within the city limits. As time goes on, Kent will become more dense, making issues of privacy and personal space even more urgent.

Citizens have been vocal in expressing concerns with both the rate of development and physical form of multifamily housing. Current regulations do not ensure that new multifamily buildings will be compatible with and become a viable part of the surrounding neighborhood or work well for the residents.

Instead, the result has been a haphazard, generally unsatisfactory level of design quality. In response, the Planning Commission and City Council determined that a design review process would be in the best interest of the community to achieve improved multifamily development.

Design Review is not an entirely new concept for Kent since there are many tools for guiding the design of multifamily development. However, they are limited to the language in the Planned Unit Development chapter, Landscaping and Development Plan Review sections of the Zoning Code, and the SEPA review process. These tools are used in a piecemeal fashion rather than through a comprehensive procedure.

Therefore, to make design review more effective the Kent City Council passed Ordinance 3014 amending the Kent Zoning Code to establish Design Review as a specific focus in the application review process of Multifamily housing developments.

This handbook supplements and expands upon the Multifamily Design Review Criteria which are found in the Kent Zoning Code.

MULTIFAMILY DESIGN REVIEW GOALS

* Increase awareness of what good multifamily design is.

* Provide multifamily building architecture and site design quality that reflects a value to the community at least equal to the single family home.

* Ensure respect for the scale of neighborhoods, thus facilitating community acceptance of proposals for new residential developments.

* Provide a pleasant and safe multifamily environment with good service facilities and recreation for all members of the family.

* Multifamily areas should be fully integrated elements of Kent's residential mosaic of neighborhoods. Good design helps maintain and improve the built environment and contributes to a positive neighborhood character.

* Provide clear objectives for those embarking on the planning and design of multi-family housing projects.

* Allow for design flexibility and foster creative design solutions to better meet the intent of the Land Use Code, as established by City policy, and neighborhood objectives.

* Improve communication and mutual understanding among developers, neighborhoods and the City early and throughout the development review process.

* Provide developers and architects with a set of performance goals which promote the highest attainable standard of quality consistent with economic feasibility for multifamily housing. The meaning of quality in this context normally covers the architect's concern for efficiency, the owners' concern for marketability, the neighborhood concern for harmony, and the tenants' concern for livability. In this report emphasis is placed on the concerns of those affected most in the long term;

HOW TO USE THE GUIDELINES

These guidelines should be studied at the beginning of the planning process and are intended to make people aware of the design issues that warrant early consideration. In planning for a new residential development, it is important to incorporate many viewpoints. Ironically, the people ultimately most affected by this process-those who will eventually live in the residences-have the least amount to say at the most critical times. It is essential to consult with as many people as possible, including the neighborhood community and city staff, to understand Kent's community values and translate them into the design of new multifamily housing.

Applicants proposing multifamily development in the City of Kent should consult these guidelines in the preparation of plans, sections, and elevations for review under the multifamily design review process. Neighbors and community groups should also find these guidelines helpful in their review of new projects.

This process is administrative, meaning it is conducted by City staff. There is no requirement for a public hearing. The steps in the design review process are outlined below.

First Meeting: The first meeting is an informal meeting between applicant and city staff to go over the requirements to be fulfilled by design review. This could take place on a walk-in basis at the Planning Department counter.

Second Meeting: Planning Department staff will meet with an applicant to discuss preliminary building and site design drawings and outline any changes which are necessary to meet the goals of design review.

SEPA Review: SEPA review will commence and take place concurrent with the remainder of the design review process so that any significant findings may be coordinated.

Pre-Development Meeting: Here design review will take place. If all necessary revisions have been incorporated in a

development proposal at this time, the applicant will proceed to the building permit process.

Note: The design review process must be initiated and substantial progress made prior to he pre-development meeting. To show substantial progress in design review, the applicant must have met with staff at least two times to discuss their development intentions.

Additional Meetings: Additional design review meetings may be required with staff depending on the nature of any changes required, the complexity of a project and any further issues which may surface in the pre-development meeting.

HANDBOOK FORMAT

The Multifamily Design Review Guidelines are divided into three major areas, **Site Design, Landscape Design** and **Building Design.** Each of these areas are broken down into specific design criteria, such as site context, open space, unit identity and character, scale, pedestrian circulation, and privacy. The criteria are presented as a check list from which to work. The text explains each one, while the pictures stand for thousands of words to make things clearer and more enjoyable.

A FINAL NOTE

Design review is not just about creating beautiful buildings or a question of personal taste, but of identified community values. It is about creating good streets, good communities and pleasant places to live and about determining whether new development fits in. Well-designed projects provide value to the owner and the community, and are a measure of the community's ability to establish a successful identity which is a source of pride, helping businesses and residents to improve property values and the quality of life.

1.a. The site plan for the development should be integrated with the surrounding neighborhood.

It is important to think of each new housing development as contributing to a larger neighborhood whole. The site design should complement and provide connection with neighborhood amenities such as parks, schools, shopping and transit routes. The site design should use the existing site context, which includes street, lot and building patterns to inform the design of new multifamily development.
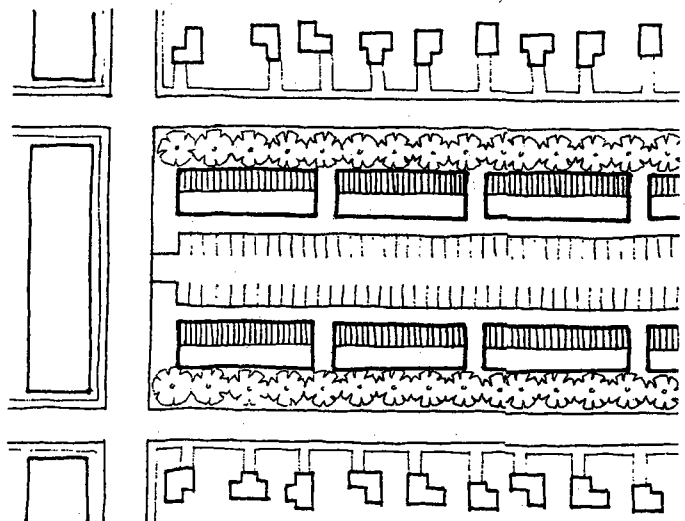
Preferred

Try to integrate new multifamily development with the surrouding neighborhood.
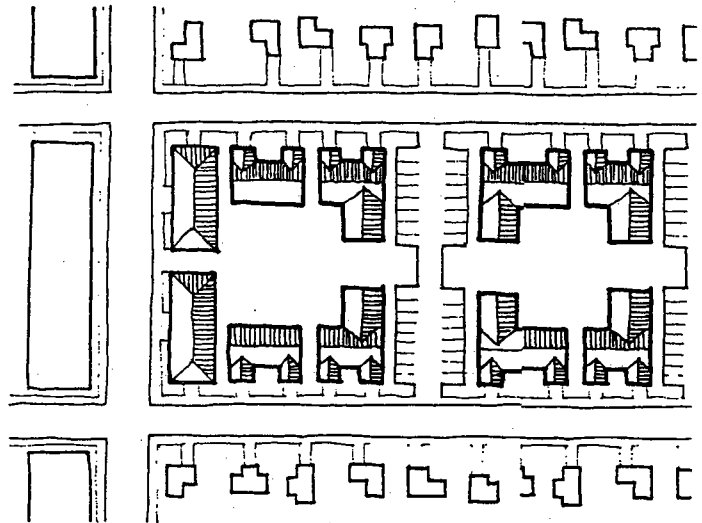
To be avoided

This scheme isolates itself from the surrounding community.

Related Guidelines

Site Design: 1.e.
Landscape Design: 2.a.
Building Design: 3.a.
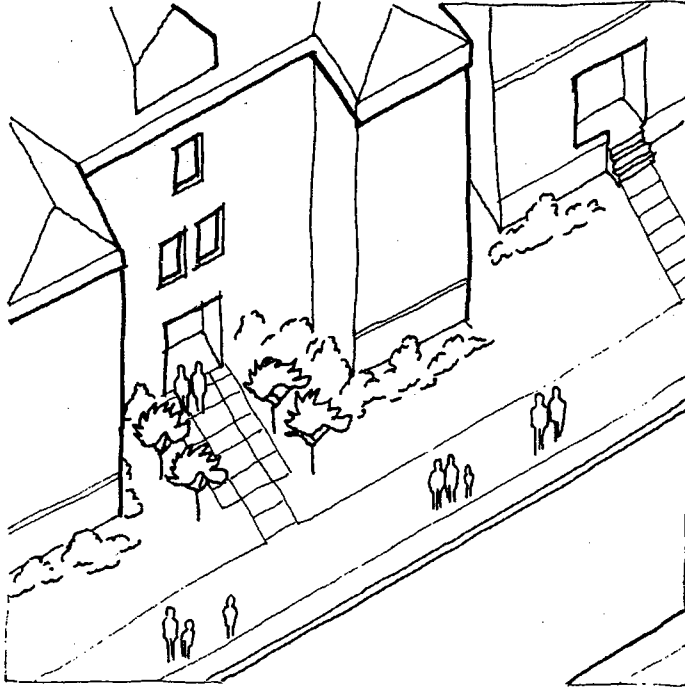
Preferred

Integrating a building into the surrounding community requires clear and convenient pedestrian access and circulation to and from the building. Entries from the street should be clearly marked. Entries from parking lots should be subordinate to those related to the street. In some clustered housing developments where there is an integrated comprehensive pathway system the front door may be oriented to it.
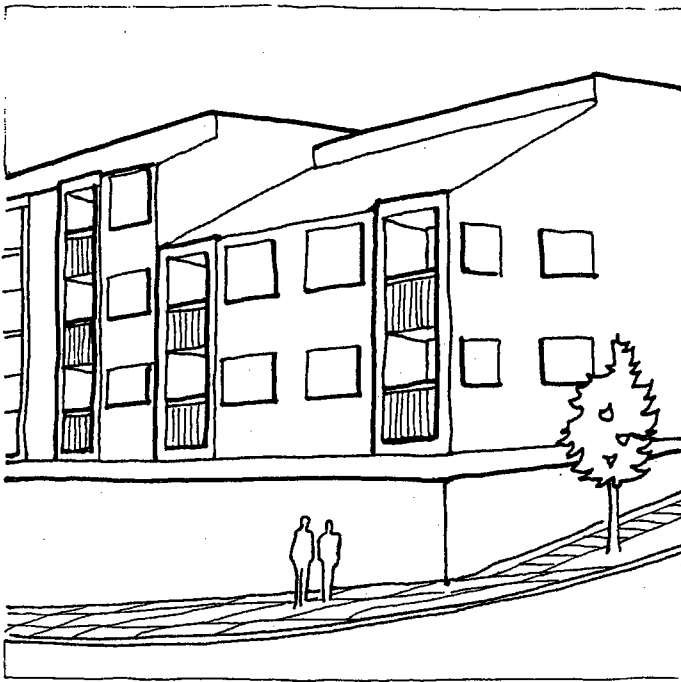
To be avoided

The lack of clear entries directly onto the street can create an unpleasant streetscape. It also hinders pedestrian circulation on and off the site.

1.b. The site plan should take into consideration significant environmental conditions and the lay of the land.

Kent has many steeply sloping sites which are zoned for housing development. The site plan should utilize the natural topography, and every effort should be made to avoid major grading and filling and use of large retaining walls. Sensitivity to topographical situations will result in a site which better accommodates pedestrian circulation while saving on engineering and construction costs associated with extensive landform alteration.

The site design should consider the local microclimate-sun, wind and rain exposure. Will buildings and open space receive adequate sunlight? To what extent can the site be designed to shelter residents from rain and wind conditions?

The site design should protect and enhance natural amenities such as large trees, waterways, wetlands, wildlife habitat and views. These natural amenities, which exist on the site, should be viewed as opportunities for a desirable multifamily development rather than as obstacles.

Preferred

In order to maintain the integrity of a sloped, tree-filled property it may be necessary to reduce grading and filling. One option may be to build a series of smaller buildings and parking lots that cascade down the site and around the trees.

To be avoided

Extensive grading and filling can be expensive, hinder pedestrian circulation and may create unstable soil conditions.
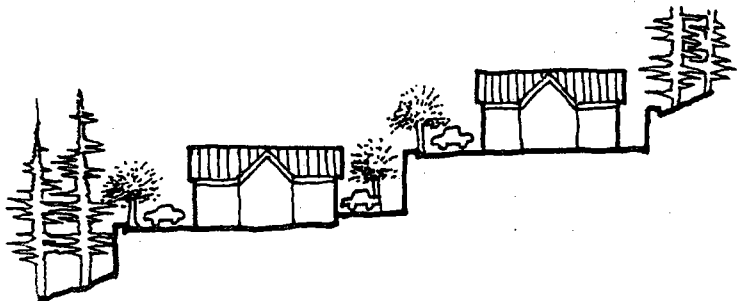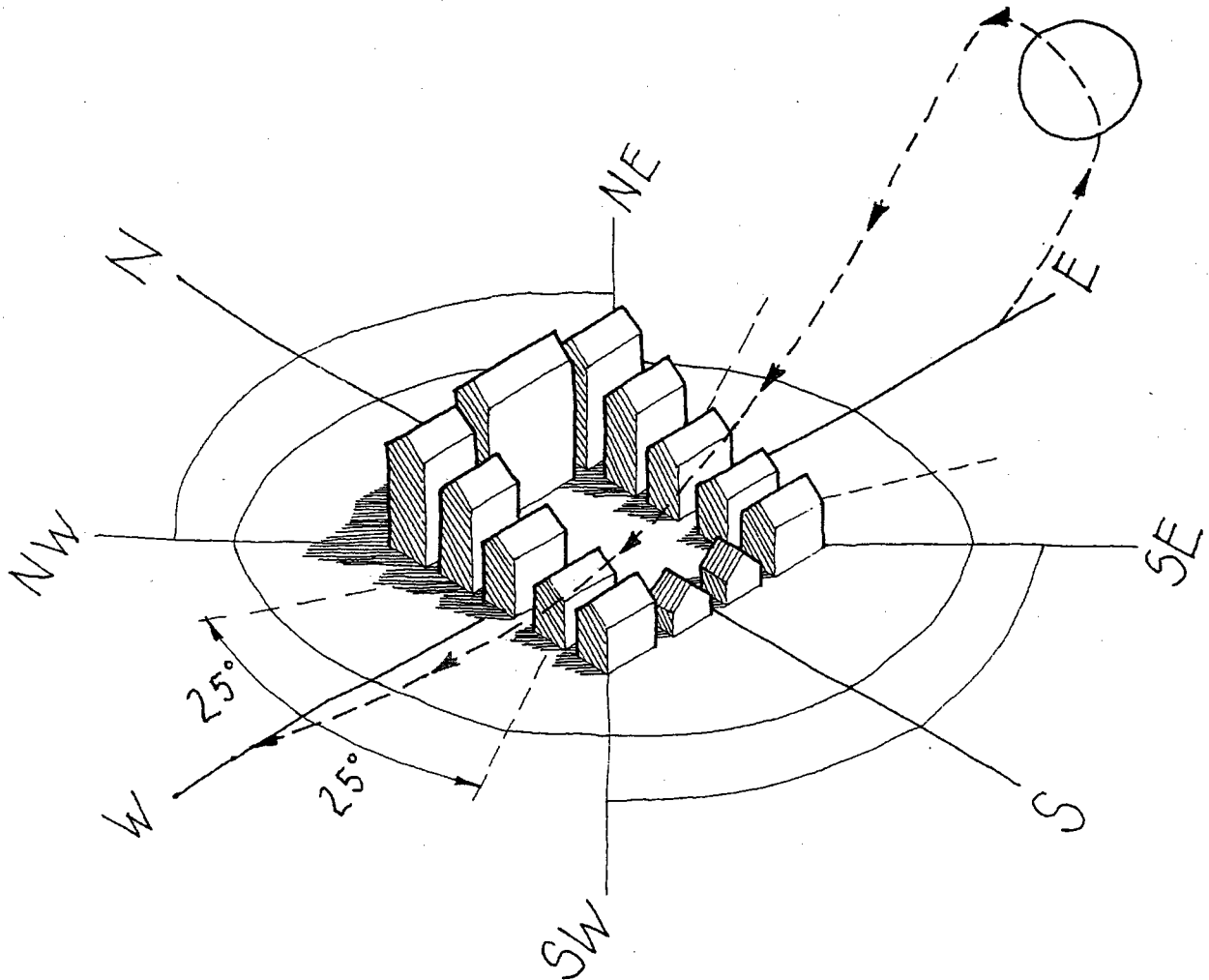
Multifamily buildings, especially those in the dreary Pacific Northwest, should be oriented for maximum sun exposure. The length of the building should be sited within 25 degrees of the east-west direction.


To protect sensitive areas, develop on the least valuable or least environmentally sensitive land. Avoid slope disturbance which may affect soil and vegetation stabilization.

1.c. The site plan should provide an open space network which will accommodate a wide variety of activities, both semi-public and private.

Each space within an open space network should be designed with a use in mind or in association with a residential unit. Activity opportunities for all ages residing in the housing should be anticipated in the site design.

The open space network should provide private or semi-private open spaces which are accessible from each residential unit. This can be achieved with balconies, screened patios or small shared courtyards. The open space network should provide for privacy of residents while allowing for security and surveillance from residential units. The open space network should be well lit at night.
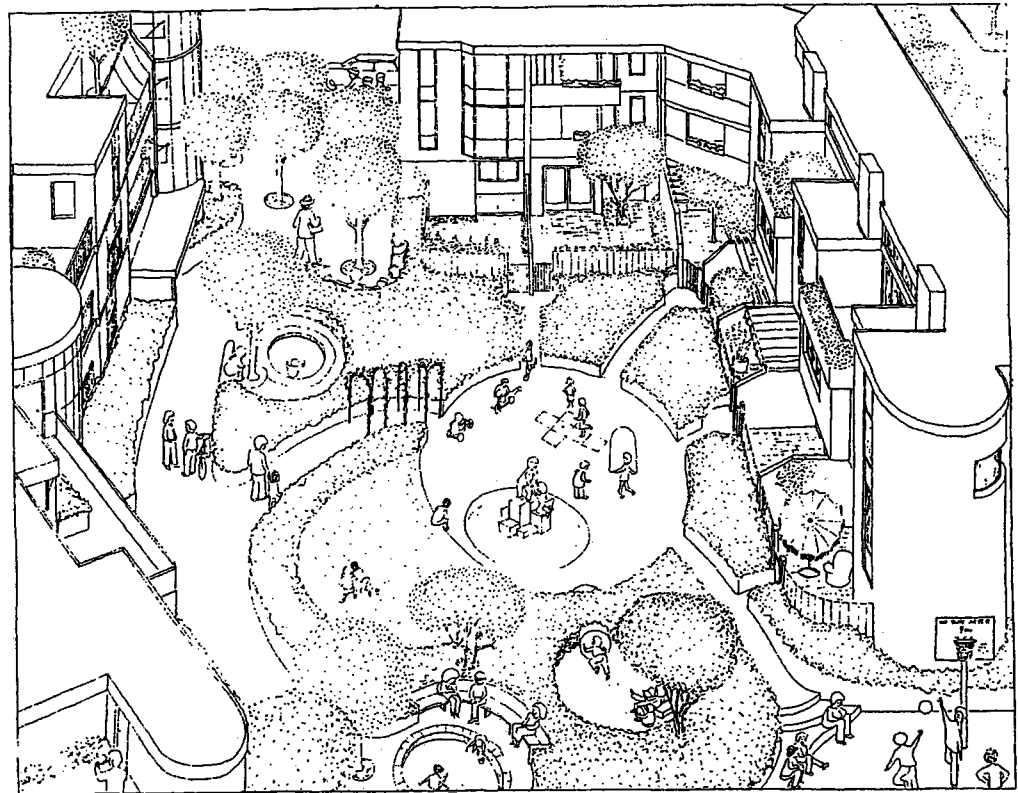
Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian

This courtyard contains a wide variety of spaces for different activities. Within this large space are a series of smaller spaces defined by fencing and landscaping. Each of these smaller spaces are lade out with a use(s) in mind. There are areas for small children to play, for adults to watch them, for older children to play basketball, and for residents to enjoy some outdoor privacy.

Related Guidelines

Site Design: 1.d., 1.e.
Landscape Design: 2.c.
Building Design: 3.b.
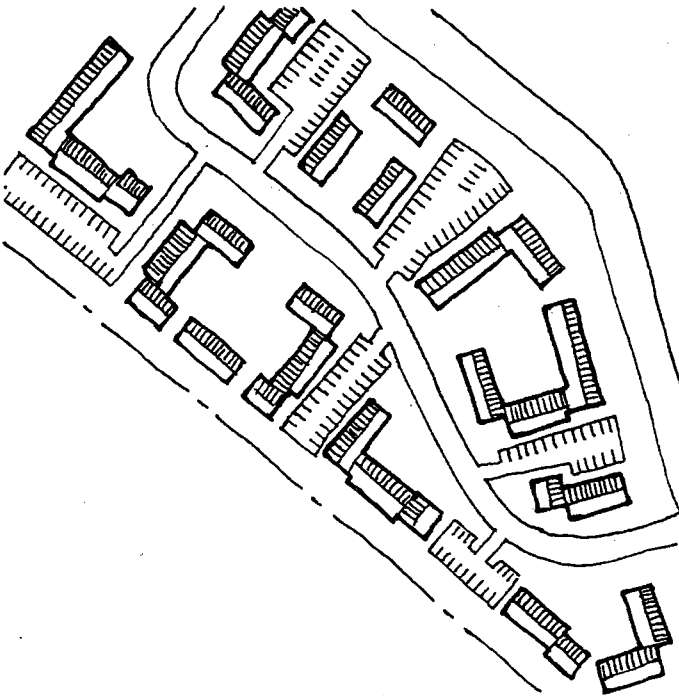
Preferred

In a large development, a series of open spaces may be incorporated into the building layout. These spaces should be easily accessible by residents and not conflict with parking. This scheme is organized into a series of courtyards each surrounded by residential units. Note how parking and open space do not conflict with one another.
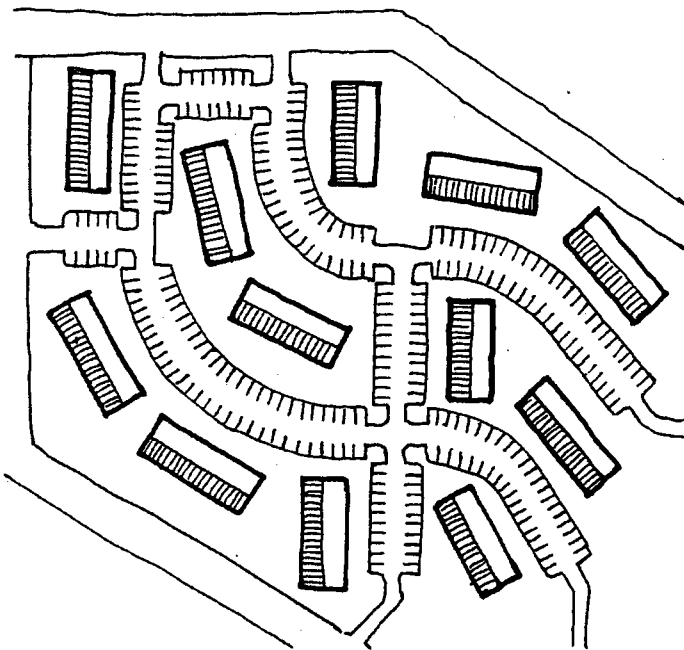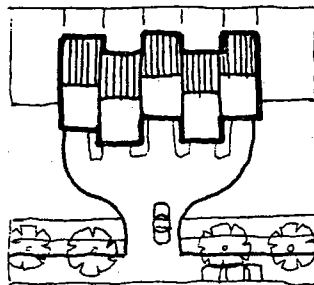

To be avoided

This scheme fails to provide a network of spaces. Rather, open space and parking are homogeneously distributed throughout the site. The car dominates the site leaving little usable outdoor space.

1.d. The site plan should accommodate vehicular access and parking in a manner which is convenient, yet does not allow the automobile to dominate the site.

Parking areas should be located to the rear or side yard so that parking areas do not dominate the streetscape. Plan for many small lots as opposed to few large ones. Parking areas should be convenient to and safely accessed by the buildings served. Utilize many small lights as opposed to few large lights in order to illuminate parking areas. (Large lights tend to "spill" into people's homes.) Locate parking and automobile circulation so as not to conflict with children's play areas.

Preferred   **To be avoided**
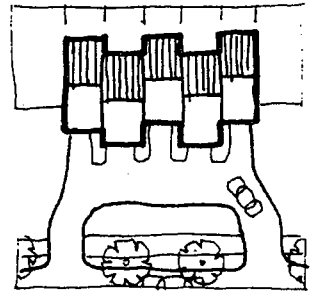
Pedestrian safety can be enhanced by consolidating driveways.

Preferred

Lighting should be of a pedestrian scale. Lower the height of lighting fixtures and use screening elements such as landscaping, fences and trellises to reduce glare into residential units.
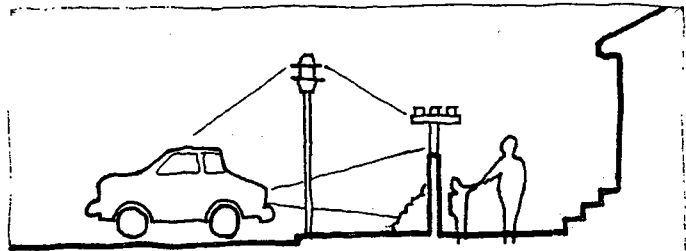
To be avoided

Locate and aim parking lot lighting to reduce glare and intrusive light patterns into residential units.

Related Guidelines

Site Design: 1.e.
Landscape Design: 2.d.

11
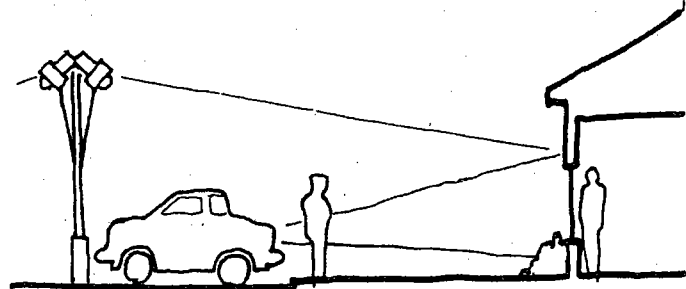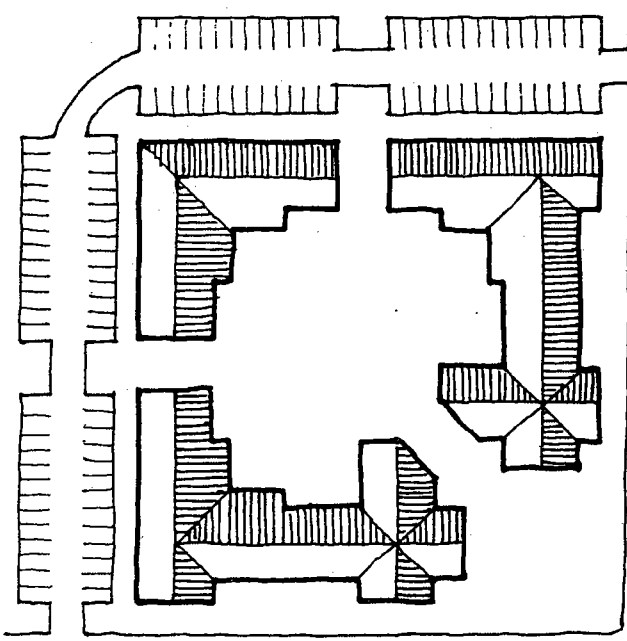
Preferred

Parking can be located near residential units without conflicting with pedestrian outdoor spaces. Separate parking from outdoor spaces by arranging buildings around an open space and placing parking on the opposite side.
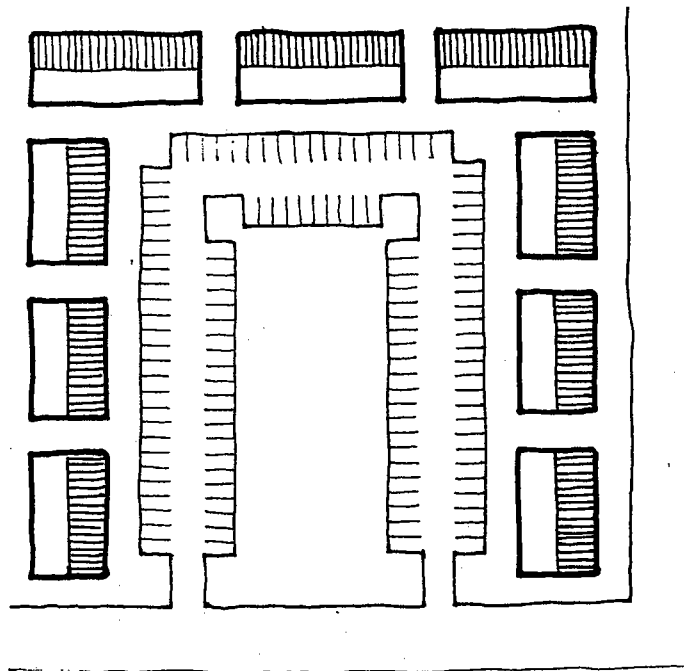
To be avoided

Pedestrian outdoor space located near or in the same area as parking is less likely to be used, especially if pedestrians must traverse parking lots to get there.

1.e. The site plan should provide safe and convenient pedestrian circulation.

In Kent, commercial and residential growth has resulted in increased automobile traffic.
Each new housing development should do its share to provide alternatives to the automobile
through the design of *pedestrian* circulation paths between the site and surrounding
neighborhood amenities such as parks, schools, and shopping.

The scale of a housing development may make a new transit stop feasible at the site.
Pedestrian pathways which link the site with existing or planned transit stops should be
provided. Within the site, pedestrian pathways which connect each unit with the parking,
open space and site amenities designed to serve it should be provided. Locate pedestrian
pathways in the normal day-to-day view of residents and passersby. Pedestrian pathways
should be well lit at night.

Preferred

Multifamily development should provide
pedestrian connections with surrounding
amenities, which may include bus stops,
mailboxes, crosswalks and pedestrian
paths that link up with schools, parks,
and shopping.
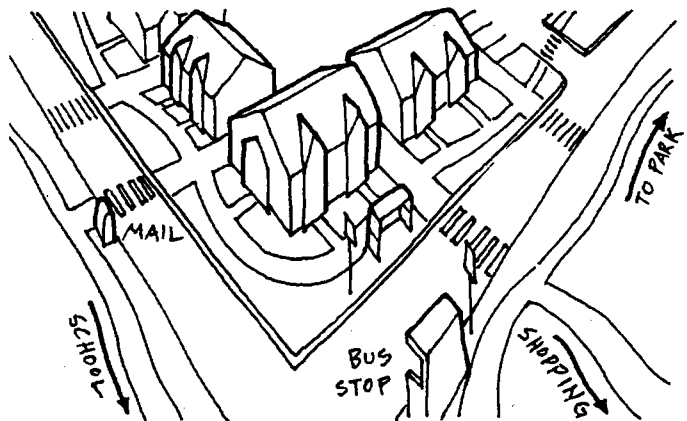
To be avoided

Multifamily complexes should not be
isolated enclaves separated from the
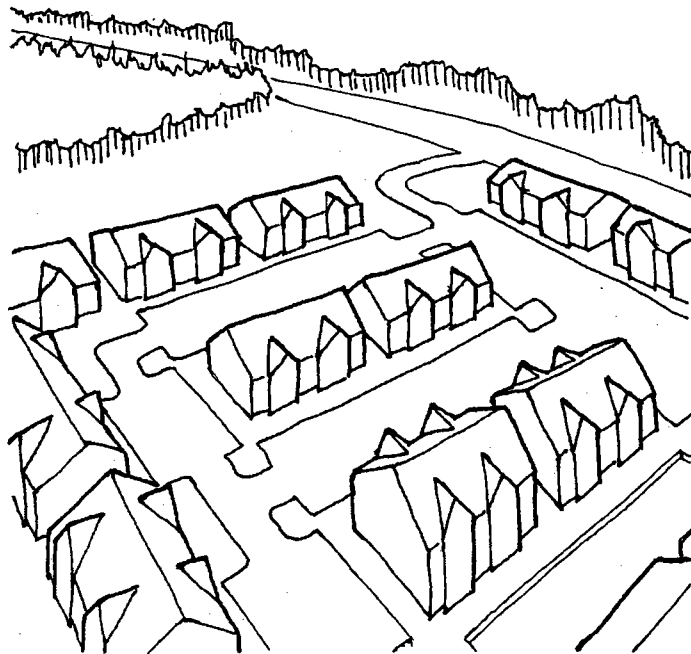neighborhood by fences, walls and
parking lots.
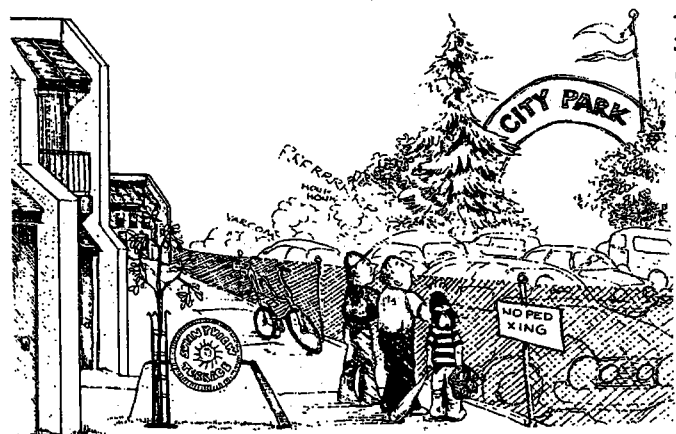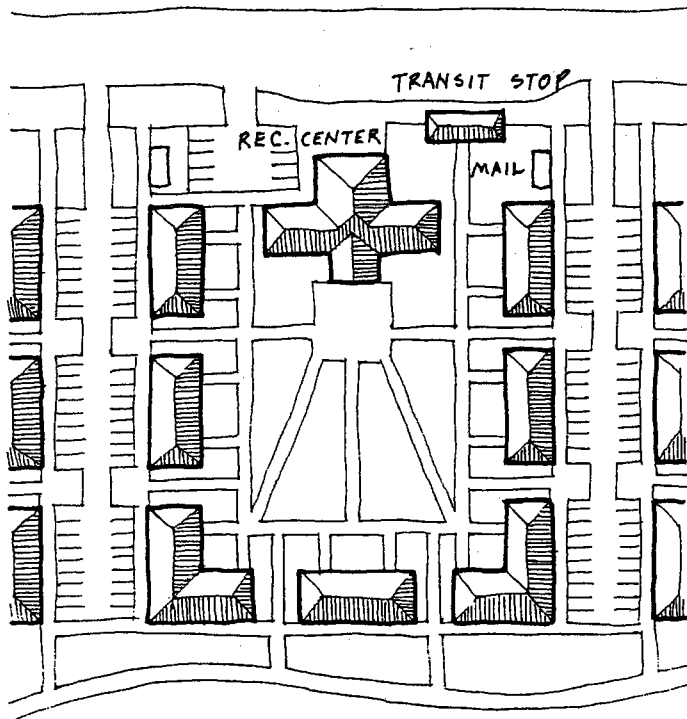
Preferred

Try to arrange buildings in a way that easily lends itself to a system of pedestrian paths and open space. Use paths to link residential units with common open spaces, recreation buildings, mail boxes and parking.

To be avoided

This scheme does not lend itself to a system of pedestrian paths and open space. It only provides for circulation back and forth between the car and the residential unit's front door.

2.a. The landscape plan should integrate with and enhance the surrounding neighborhood landscape.

Dominant landscape features in the neighborhood, natural or man-made, should be reflected in landscape plan. These features include retention of mature trees or other native vegetation, a greenbelt or other open space corridor, a trail system or formal landscaping along a public right-of-way. If there is a common landscaping theme that emphasizes similar plant materials, landscape design, fixtures and construction materials new development should reinforce them.

Street trees should be incorporated into the landscape plan of new multifamily developments when they exist in the surrounding neighborhood.

Related Guidelines

Site Design: 1.b.
Landscape Design: 2.b.
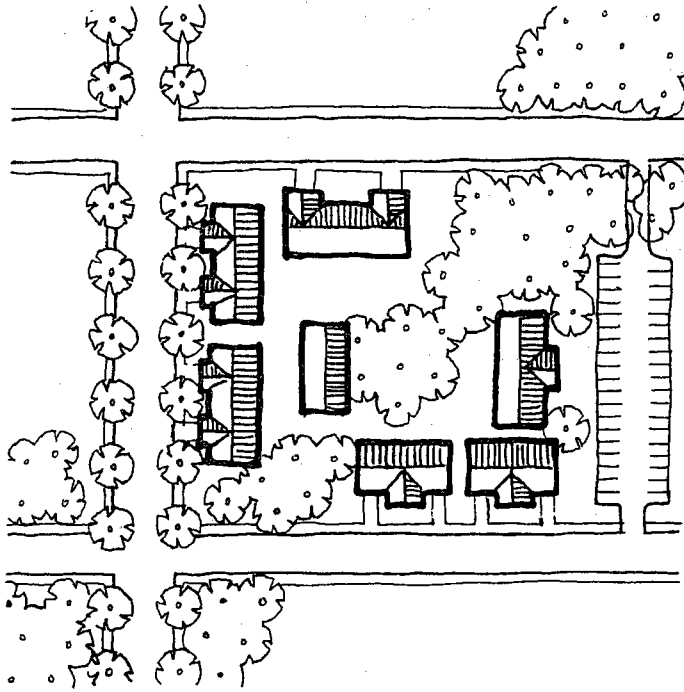
Preferred

Try to incorporate natural landscape features, such as a greenbelt, and add man-made ones, such as street trees, into the design of new multifamily development.
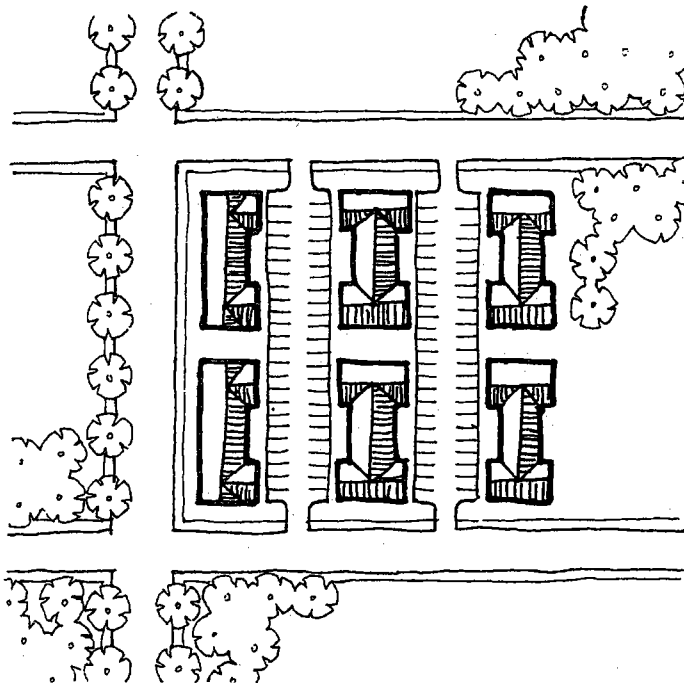
To be avoided

Many neighborhoods value their existing natural amenities. New landscape plans should preserve the existing natural landscape. Clearing a site before construction may eliminate an opportunity to incorporate existing greenbelts, or other landscape amenities.

2.b. The landscape plan should incorporate existing natural features of significance.

The landscape plan should enhance existing topographical conditions. The landscape plan should incorporate significant natural amenities such as waterways, wetlands, large trees and wildlife habitat. The landscape plan should preserve and enhance view corridors.
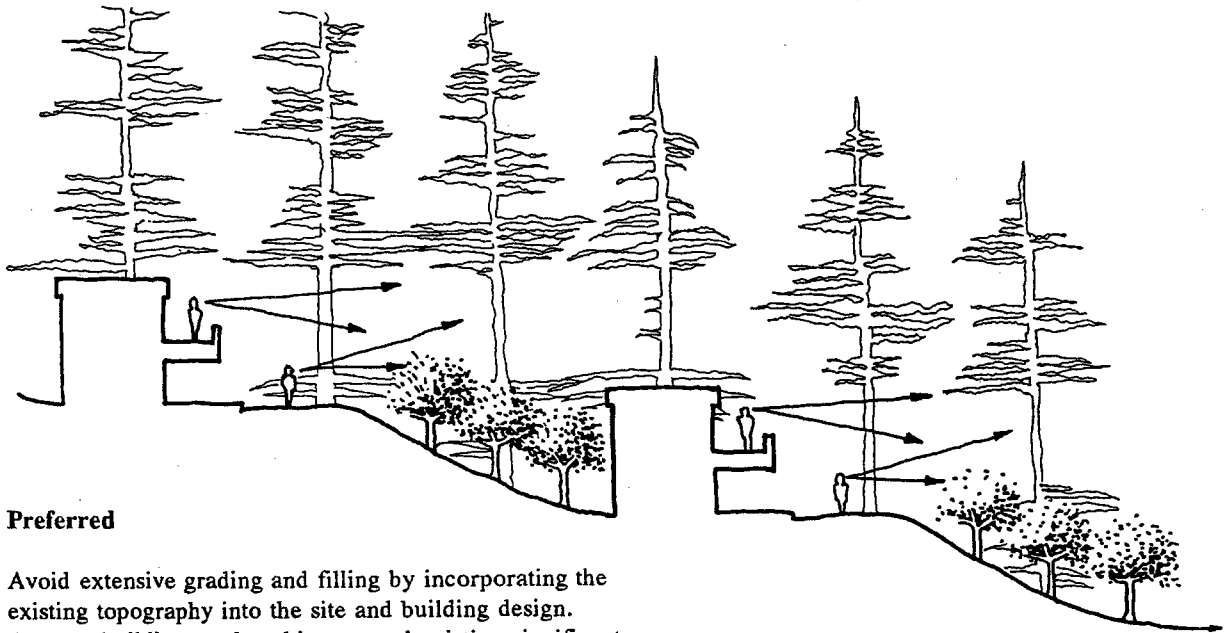
Preferred

Avoid extensive grading and filling by incorporating the existing topography into the site and building design. Arrange buildings and parking around existing significant trees. If necessary, prune trees instead of chopping or topping them when preserving views.
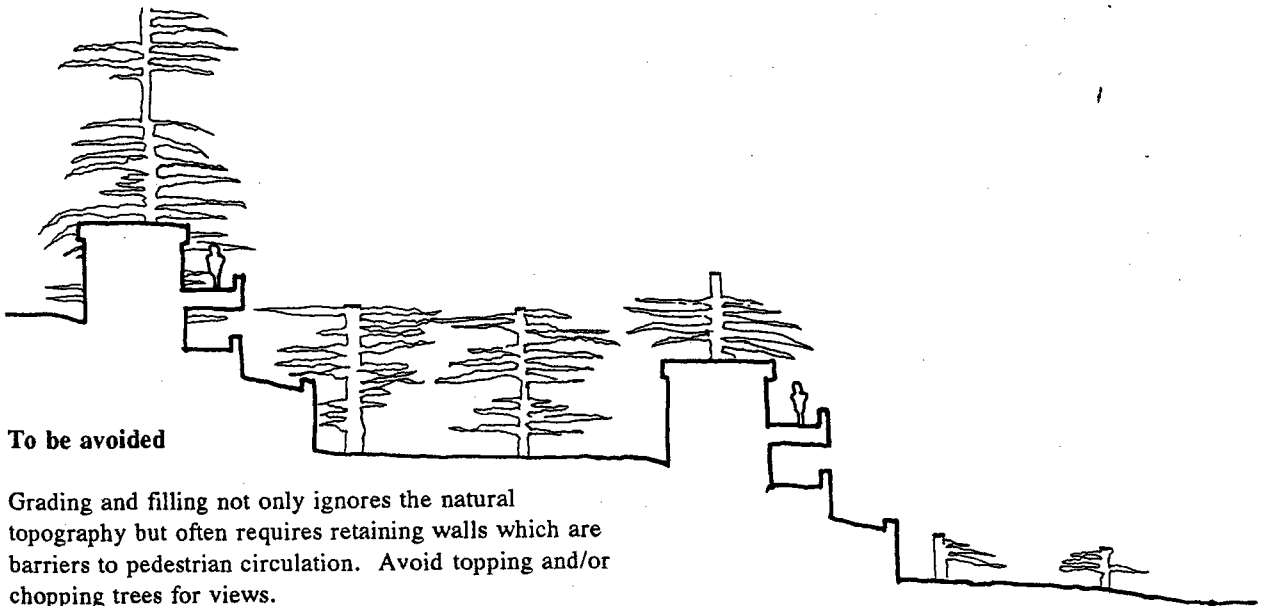
To be avoided

Grading and filling not only ignores the natural topography but often requires retaining walls which are barriers to pedestrian circulation. Avoid topping and/or chopping trees for views.

Related Guidelines

Site planning that retains significant trees can make a new project seem like an established part of the neighborhood.
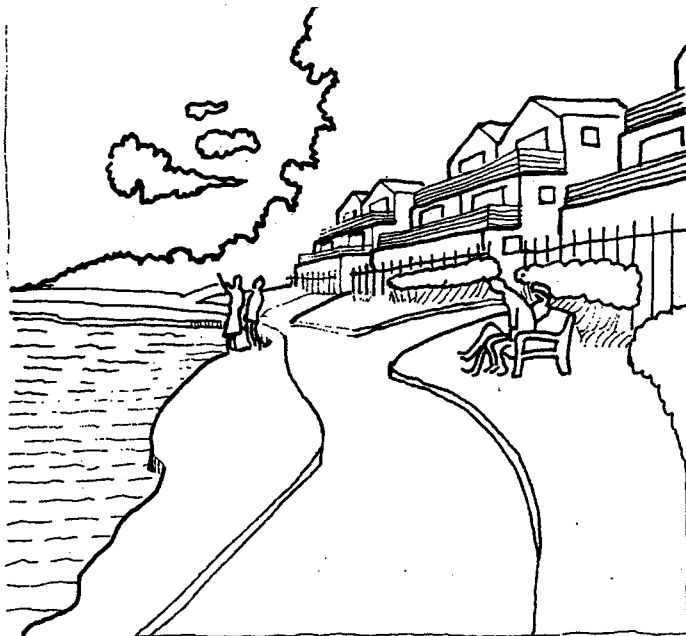
Incorporating existing water features such as streams, ponds, and wetlands into the landscape design can lend a natural amenity and distinctive identity to a project.

2.c. The landscape plan should enhance the planned open space network.

Large expanses of open space, when ill-defined, are often little used by residents. People feel more comfortable in spaces when there is a certain sense of enclosure and privacy. This is particularly true when planned activities are passive such as sitting under a tree reading a book or talking in a small group.

Landscape elements should help define open space activity areas but not hinder planned activities. For example, will large trees, planted too close, shade and drop leaves into a swimming pool? Landscape elements should provide opportunities for shade and wind protection for public spaces. The landscape plan may include an area for gardening if residents will likely utilize this space.

Preferred

Outdoor spaces are more likely to be used if landscaping is arranged to give a sense of enclosure and intimacy.
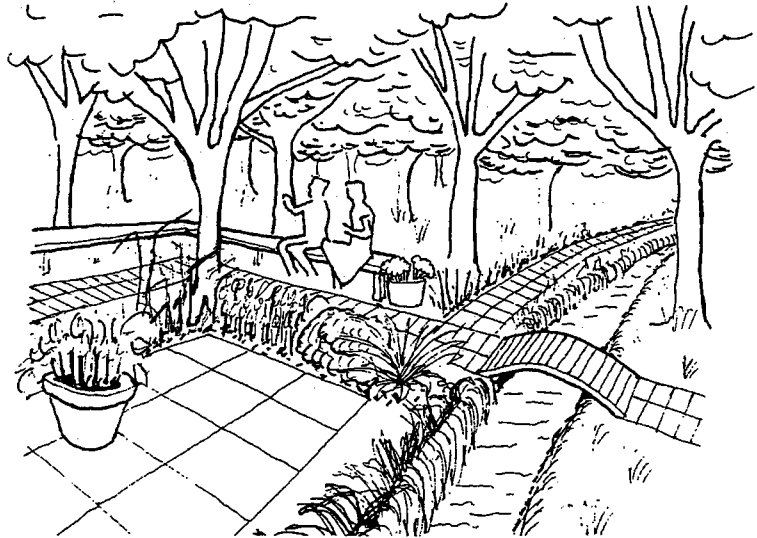
To be avoided

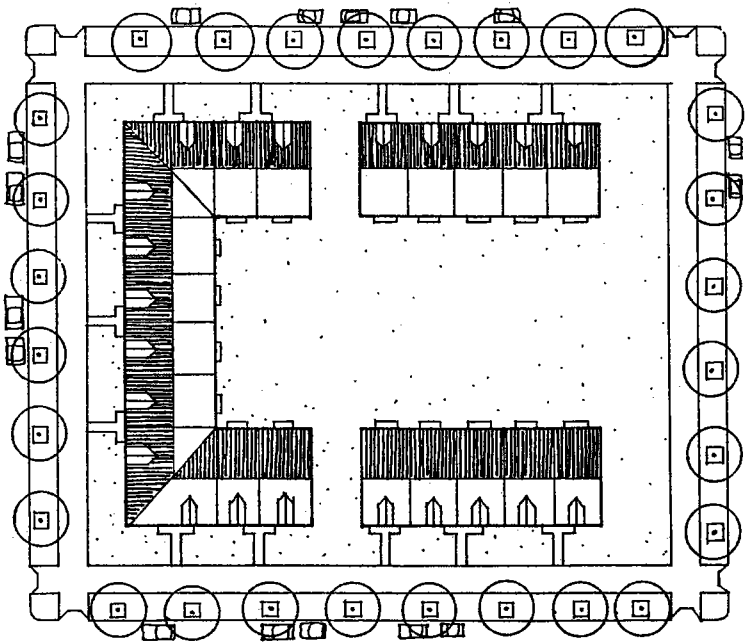People are less likely to use an outdoor space that is poorly designed.
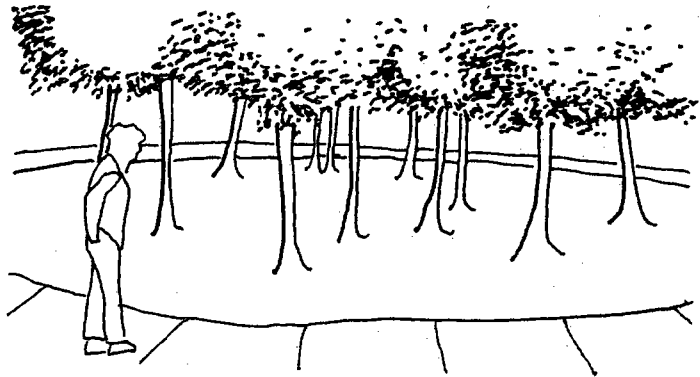
Related Guidelines

Site Design: 1.c.
Landscape Design: 2.d.
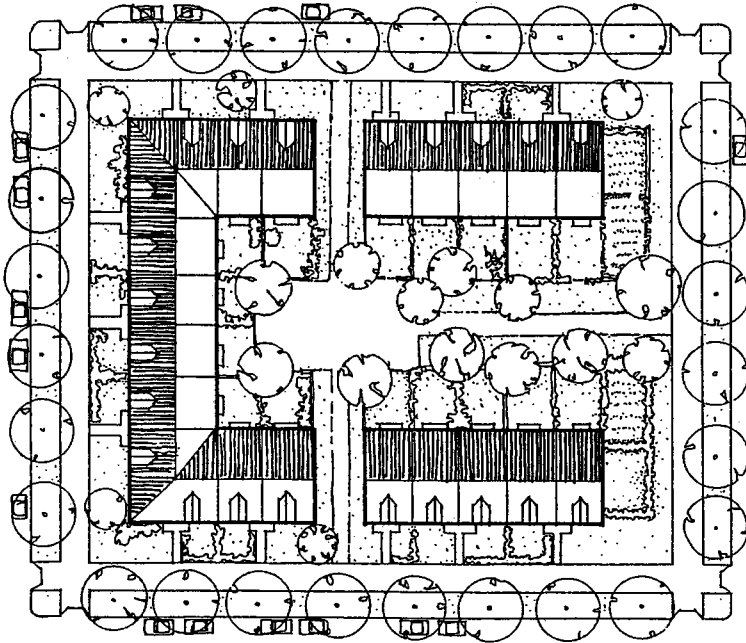
Preferred

Use landscaping to define smaller
spaces, such as private outdoor spaces,
pedestrian paths, a central courtyard and
entry courts, within a larger space.

To be avoided

This landscape plan does not organize
the open space into a system of smaller,
usable spaces.

2.d. The landscape plan should enhance the parking and utility areas on the site.

Landscaping should be utilized to help break up and screen parking areas.   Landscaping should also screen utility areas such as garbage dumpsters and mechanical equipment.
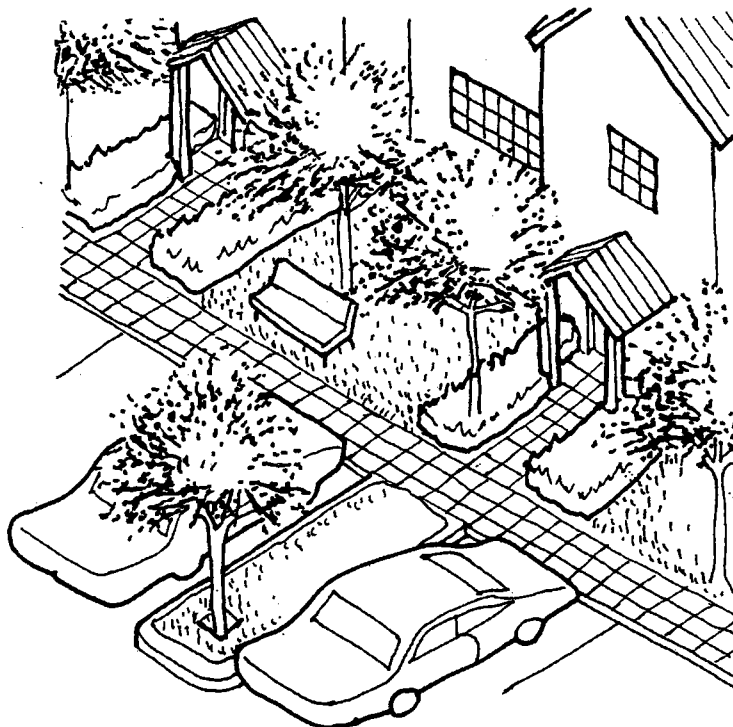
Landscaped areas between residential units and parking help screen automobiles and traffic, and if wide enough, space can be provided for pedestrian circulation, private yards, common yards and entry courts.

Provide a durable and attractive structure to screen dumpsters and trash areas. Locate trash areas away from the street edge and not generally visible from the sidewalk.
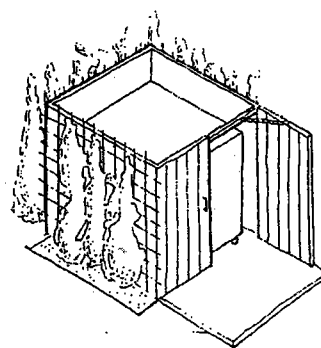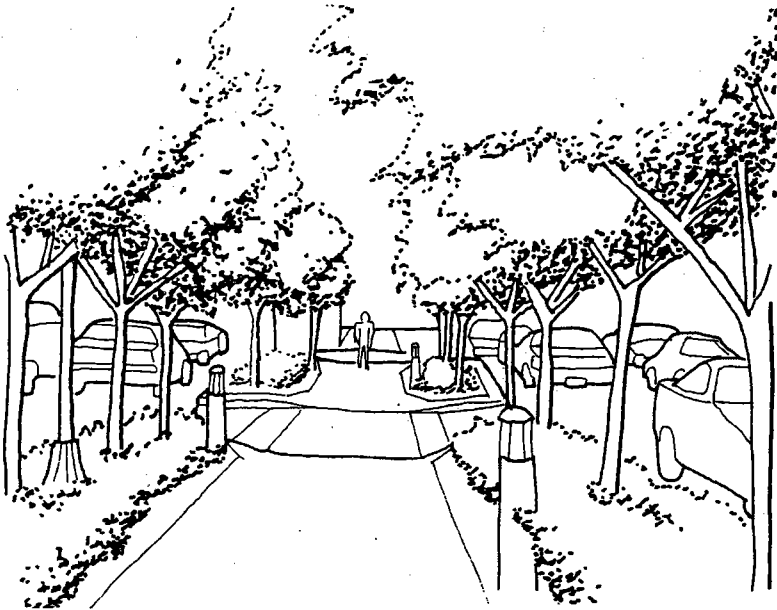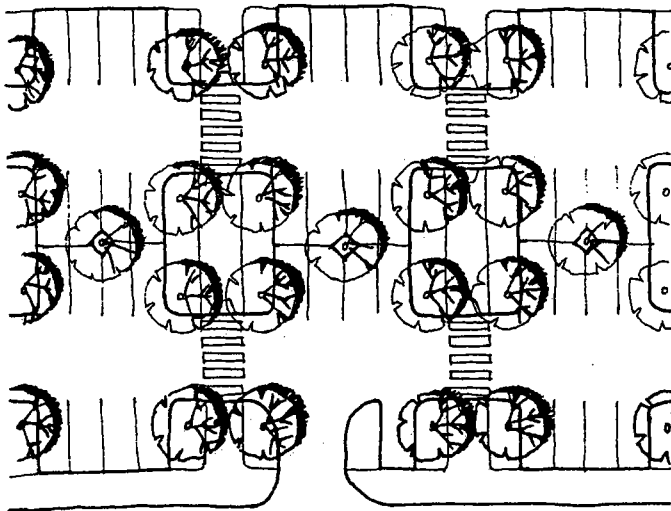
Extensive landscaping, attractive light fixtures and inviting pedestrian walkways all help make a parking lot safer and more visually attractive.

This plan illustrates how the landscaped pedestrian walkway shown above might be incorporated into a parking lot plan.

2.e. The landscape plan should enhance building forms and orientation.

Landscape elements surrounding buildings should be in scale with the building with mature plant size taken into consideration. Trees and shrubs can be planted to enhance entries and in groupings which relate to building modulation. Landscape elements should provide for shading of buildings and sun exposure where desirable.

Preferred

Generous landscaping and a well detailed, low wall help create a garden for the residents in the entry forecourt of this residential building.
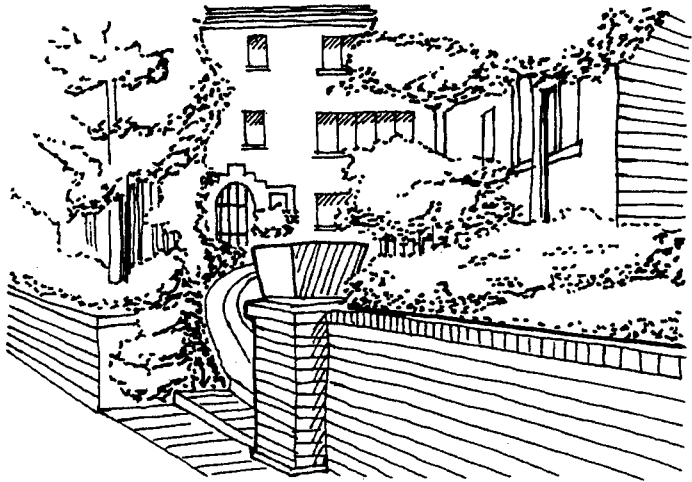
To be avoided

This landscaping is too scarce and small to visually enhance the building. Know what the eventual tree size will be before planting since some types of trees never grow to be in scale with the buildings.
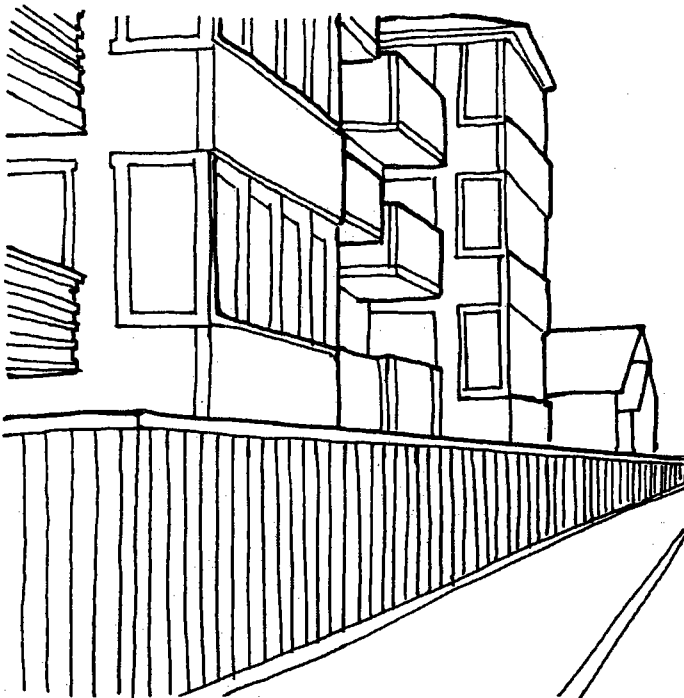
Preferred

The lattice work and landscaping help
define the building entrances and
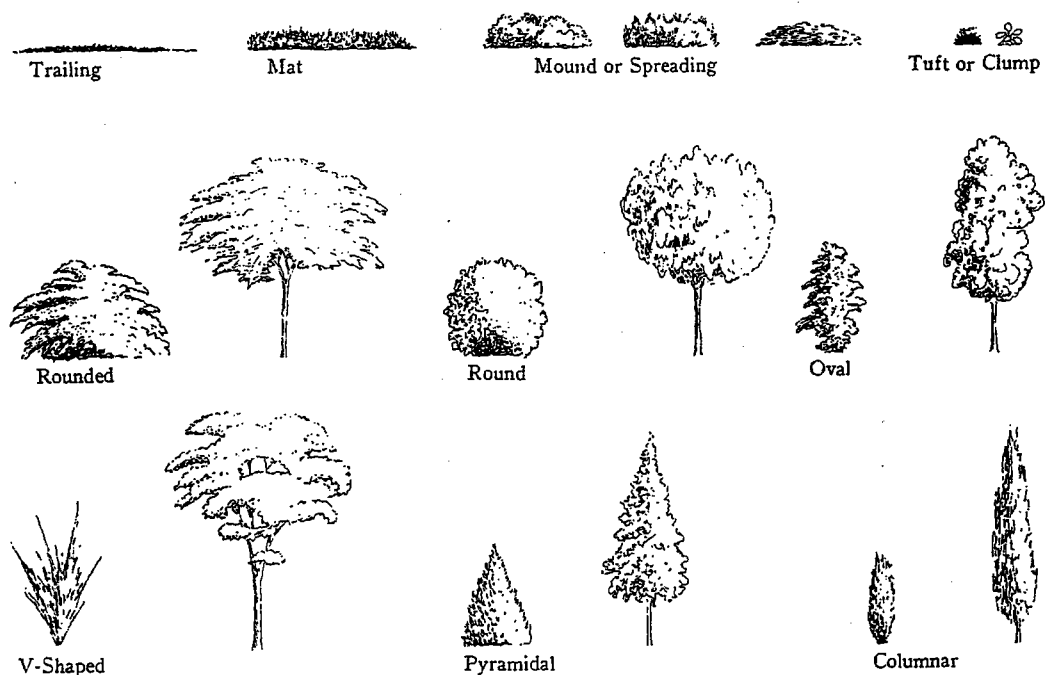improve the pedestrian environment.

To be avoided

A plain wall without landscaping is
visually unattractive and makes multi-
family buildings seem more obtrusive.

2.f. The landscape plan should indicate use of plant species suited to the microclimate of the site and should provide for maintenance of these plants.

Plant materials should be chosen which can withstand traffic and our local climate. Select the species which require the least maintenance and are most likely to survive. Select related landscape materials such as paving, seating, and the like which are durable and easy to maintain.

Manner of Growth

Trailing   Mat   Mound or Spreading   Tuft or Clump

Rounded   Round   Oval

V-Shaped   Pyramidal   Columnar

Here are some basic plant shapes to keep in mind when making a landscape plan. Use this illustration with the addendum titled "List of Plants for the Pacific Northwest", when deciding on plant types for new development in Kent. The information included in the addendum has been provided with the permission of Pacific Northwest Cooperative Extension Services.
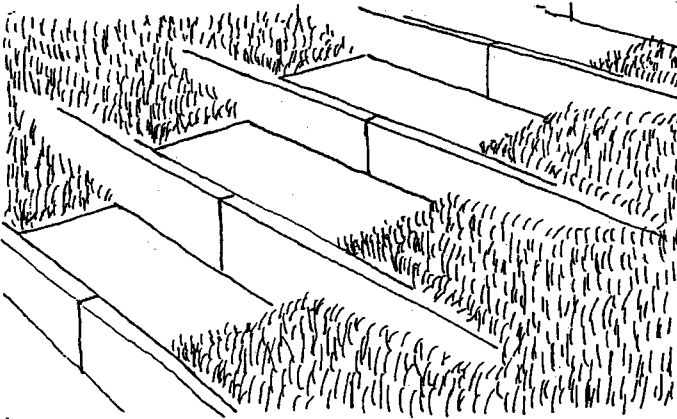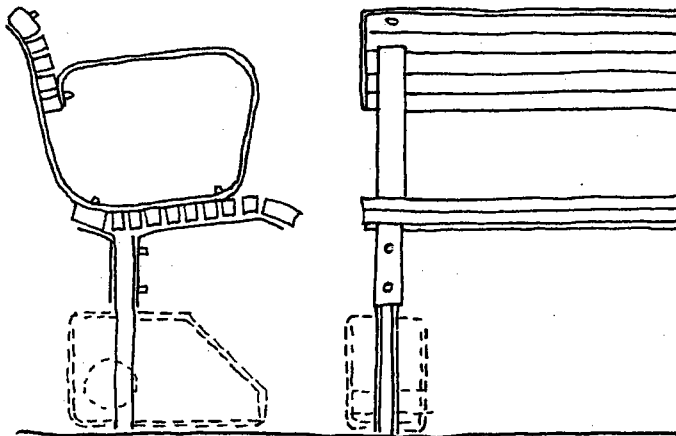
Landscape materials not only include plants but also paving, such as tile, stone and brick. They are durable, easy to maintain and attractive.
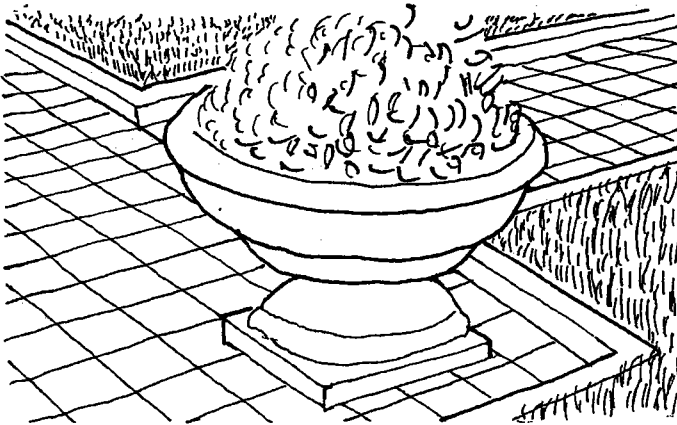
Sculptural elements such as planters and fountains add visual interest to open spaces.

Attractive and durable benches should be incorporated into the landscape design of common open spaces.

3.a. The buildings in the development should, where appropriate, maintain neighborhood scale and density.

While the actual density may remain high, the design of a residential development can go a long way in reducing the perception of density. This is particularly important for infill development where neighborhood residents may feel it's getting a little crowded. The applicant must pay particular attention to building scale and modulation on sites which are adjacent to single-family or other smaller scale development. Building scale, massing, and modulation can reduce the perceived density of a development if handled well in the design of a project.

Preferred

Facade modulation and pitched roofs reduce the apparent bulk of this building and helps fit it in better with the small single-family houses next door.
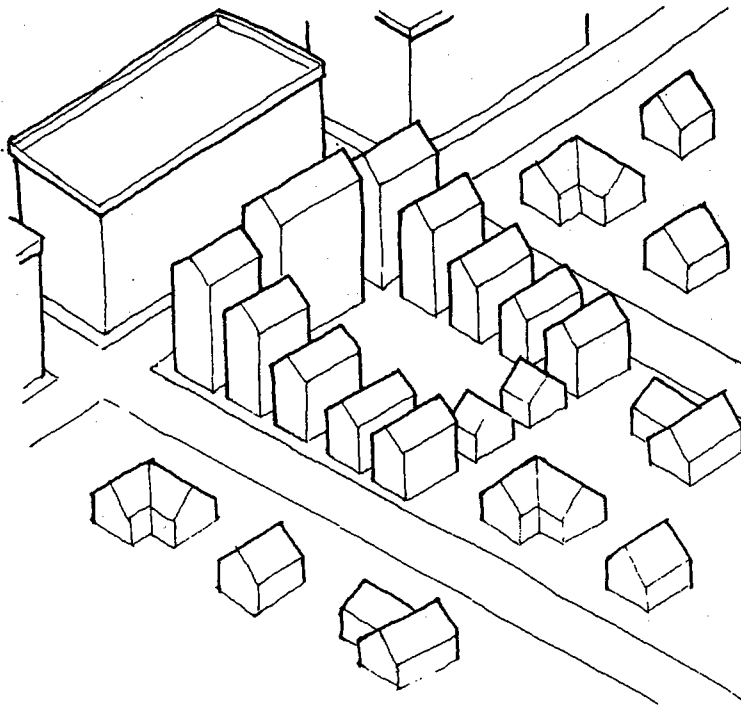
To be avoided

This new apartment building is not compatible with its single-family neighbors.

Related Guidelines

Site Design: 1.a.
Building Design: 3.c.

Preferred

This diagram shows one massing strategy applied to a site located between a single-family neighborhood and a more intensely used site, such as multifamily or commercial. Most often, different sides of a site are adjacent to different conditions and require different design responses.
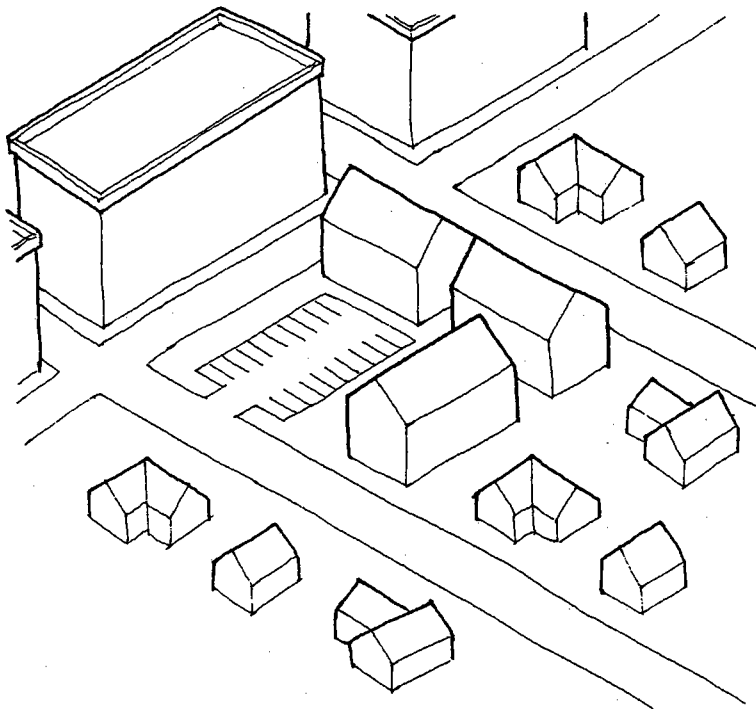
To be avoided

Conditions surrounding the site should not be ignored, instead they should be used to inform the design.

3.b. The buildings in the development should be oriented to provide for privacy of residents.

Window placement is extremely important in maintaining a sense of privacy in multifamily development. Windows should not be placed so that residents from one unit look directly into another unit. When this is unavoidable, buildings should be spaced at greater distances or utilize landscaping to provide for privacy. The number of units using a common entrance should be minimized for security as well as privacy. Privacy in ground floor units is especially important. Parking areas and common activity areas should not impose upon a unit's privacy.

Preferred

The entry court of this apartment is located adjacent to the neighboring residence and interior spaces are arranged so the views into the neighboring properties are minimized.
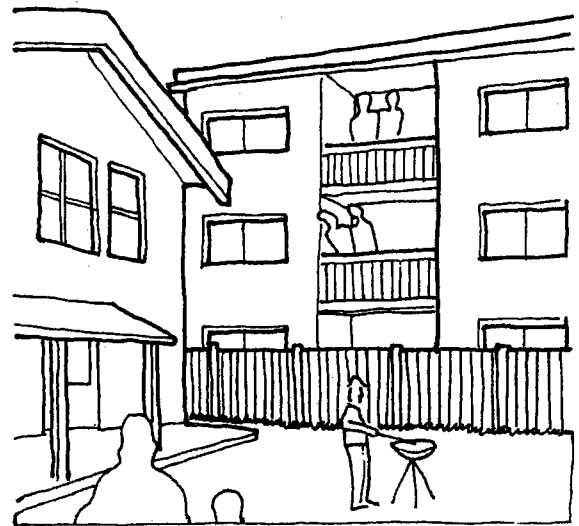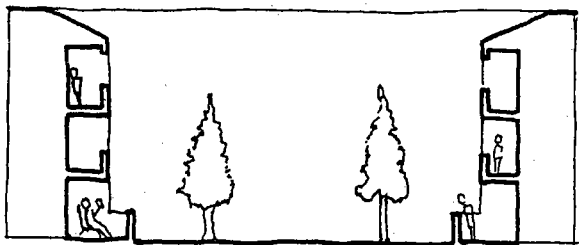
To be avoided

Inappropriate siting, along with poor window and balcony placement can reduce the privacy of adjacent residential units.
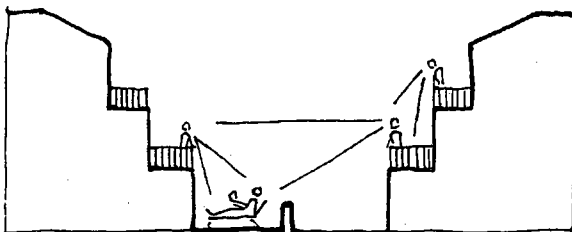
Related Guidelines

Site Design: 1.c.
Landscape Design: 2.c.
Building Design: 3.c.

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Preferred

Buildings facing one another should be kept as far apart as possible. Windows and balconies should be located and oriented to provide for privacy.
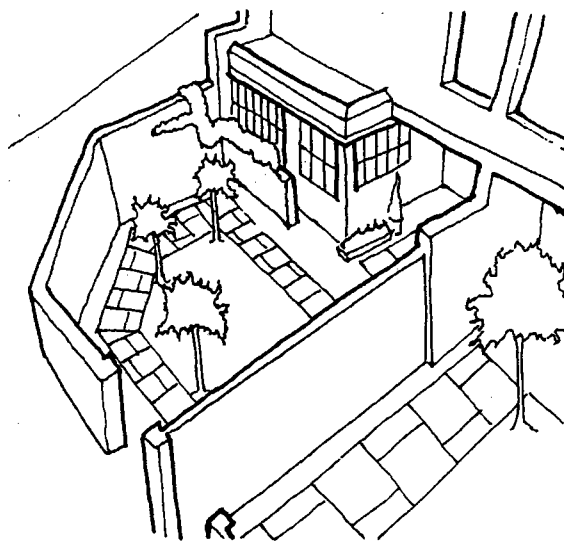

To be avoided

Even though each unit has been provided with a balcony or private patio, they might not be used because residents can be easily observed by their neighbors.


Residential units should have privacy in every room including a small private outdoor space off of the main living areas.

Units on the ground floor should have a private outdoor space, screened by either a fence, wall, landscaping or a combination of all three.

3.c. The exterior design of all buildings in the development should provide for individual unit identity.

Although more and more people now live in multifamily housing and do so for longer periods of time, most people still long for their own detached home. Through the use of modulation, color and other architectural elements, each unit can be given its own sense of identity. Incorporate elements such as balconies, window boxes, private gardens or patios, and private entries which residents can personalize.
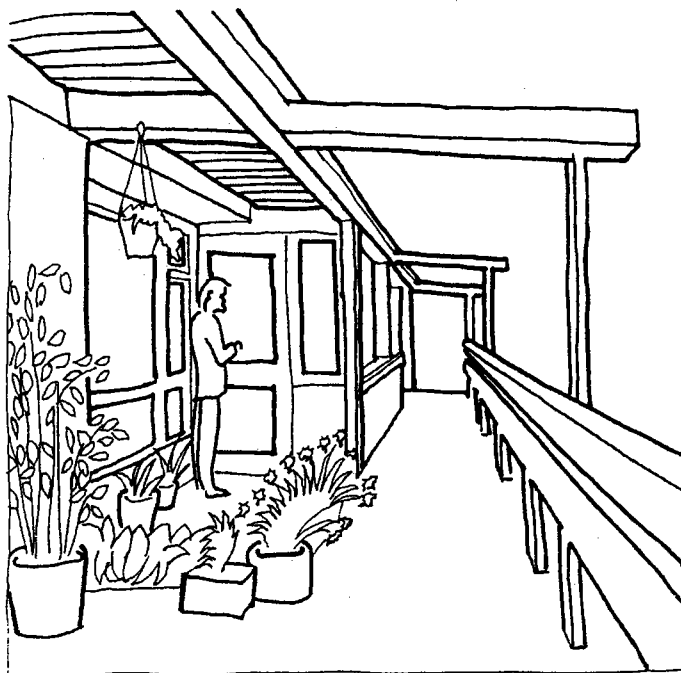

Building entries should provide a space, out of the way of pedestrian traffic but within view, that residents can personalize.

Preferred

These multifamily facades are all reasonably well designed; they are broken down into smaller intervals with each designed at a level of detail similar to an average single family home. This design method helps divide up a building's mass, reduce its apparent size and adds visual interest.
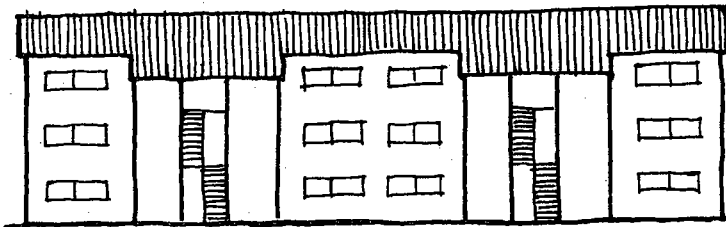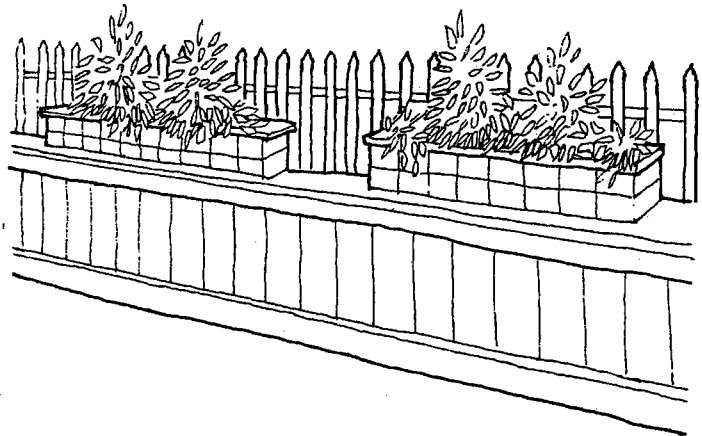
To be avoided

When no concern is given to good building design, multifamily development can be boring and alienating.
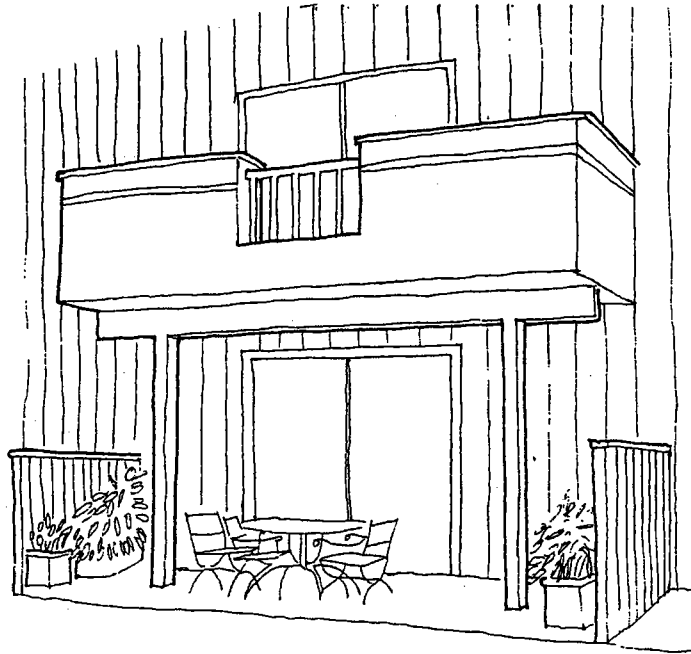
Balconies and patios help give residential units an individual identity. Residents can personalize these spaces with plants and outdoor furniture.

This decorative picket fence incorporates a solid half wall lined with flower boxes and is an attractive alternative to most ordinary fences.
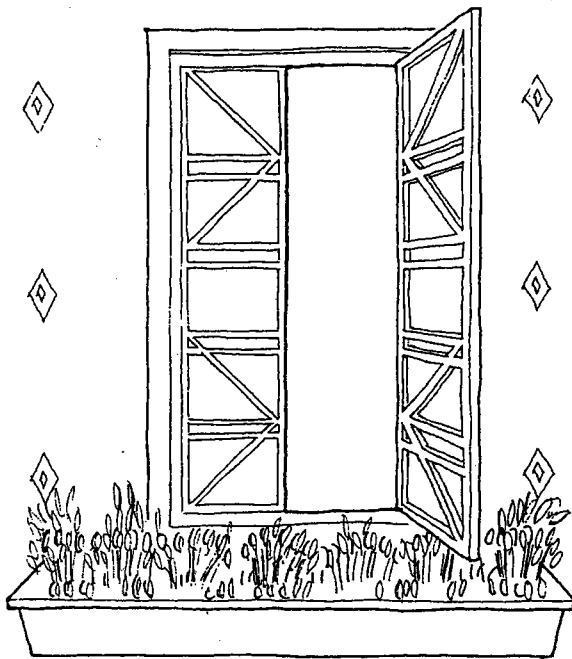
Windows should be easily operable as well as decorative.
Flower boxes along the window sill give residents
opportunities to personalize the exterior of the units and add
visual interest.
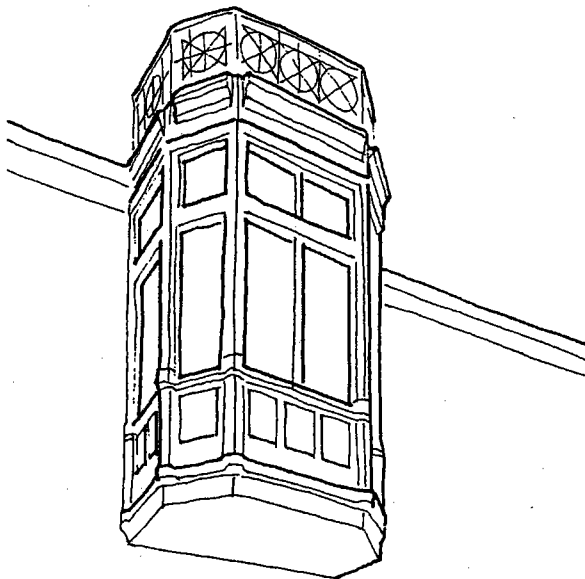
Occupiable spaces such as bay windows and balconies lend
human scale. Design features such as balconies and bays add
to the quality of residential units themselves as well as visual
interest to the building's exterior.